

### **3.11 RIPARIAN AND WETLAND RESOURCES**

Riparian areas and wetlands are considered some of the most diverse and productive portions of the VPA, but on the landscape level riparian areas and wetlands typically compose less than 1 percent of the total land area. Benefits from these areas are essential to both human and wildlife values. The lifecycles of most mammals, birds, amphibians, and fishes rely partially or wholly on riparian and wetland areas. Sensitive species such as the Ute ladies'-tresses, bald eagles, and Western yellow-billed cuckoos have their primary habitat in riparian areas. Additionally, these areas provide recreational, scenic, livestock production, and hunting areas for humans. Often, riparian and wetland resources are among the first landscape features to show impacts from management activities and often reflect overall watershed condition.

#### **3.11.1 Regional Overview**

Approximately 16,000 acres of riparian zones are found along the Green and White Rivers and Bitter, Evacuation, Sweetwater, and Willow Creeks in the Book Cliffs portion of the VPA. As of 1982, 470 acres of riparian zones in the Book Cliffs portion of the VPA were identified as being in poor ecological condition (BLM 1984). The Diamond Mountain portion of the VPA contains 60,300 acres of riparian lands (2 percent of the inventoried lands), with 15,650 acres of the 60,300 acres in public lands. There are 540 miles of perennial and intermittent streams in the VPA (BLM 1993b). The BLM manages its riparian zones for multiple uses, including recreation, grazing, wildlife habitat, and other uses.

Wetlands in the study area are primarily adjacent to riparian zones and reservoirs. Additionally, several constructed water impoundments, the Pariette Wetlands, Bitter Creek Marsh, and springs are found in the VPA. The Pariette Wetlands have the largest contiguous area of wetlands in the VPA, and they are the largest waterfowl management area managed by the BLM in Utah. Specifically, the Pariette Wetlands area encompasses approximately 9,033 acres, 2,529 acres of which have riparian-wetland characteristics. The Pariette Wetlands riparian areas are situated along 7 miles of Pariette Draw, approximately 24 miles southwest of Vernal. Wetlands are divided between 20 ponds and impoundments that are regulated for waterfowl and migratory bird habitat. Bitter Creek contains vital riparian zones with box elders, aspens, willows, and sedges which support a variety of life including reptiles, amphibians, and waterfowl. The streams and adjacent cliffs provide habitat for birds including peregrine falcons and golden eagles and provide prime calving grounds for elk and habitat for deer.

#### **3.11.2 Riparian and Wetland Inventory**

The Vernal Field Office has prepared a preliminary inventory of riparian and wetland resources within the VPA, although, as of October 2003, a comprehensive assessment of riparian condition has yet to be conducted by a full ID Team. As identified in the preliminary riparian inventory there are 295 miles and 3,674 acres of riparian areas currently in proper functioning condition, 133 miles and 1,452 acres functioning at risk, and 79 miles and 1,213 acres that are not in properly functioning condition. These are preliminary numbers and they may change as the inventory is completed. Figure 5 Forage displays the coverage of riparian and wetland inventory data within the VPA. Functioning condition is divided into three classes: properly functioning condition (PFC), functioning at risk (FAR), and non-functioning (NF). (See Glossary for definitions)

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